

TITLE: LAND AT WILLOW WALK ELY

Committee: Finance & Assets Committee

Date: 23rd January 2023

Author: Director Legal & Monitoring Officer

Report No: X133

Contact Officer:

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1.0 ISSUE

- 1.1. The Council has received a request from Cathedral View Childcare Ltd (“Cathedral View”) for a licence of Council owned land in Willow Walk, Ely, Cambridgeshire for the purpose of setting up a “forest school” to teach children to respect and conserve the environment whilst learning in the great outdoors.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 2.1. Members are requested to:

- (i) Agree the grant of a licence to Cathedral View Childcare Ltd of the land at Willow Walk, Ely on the terms detailed in paragraph 3.5 of the report; and
- (ii) Authorise the Director Legal & Monitoring Officer to proceed accordingly.

3.0 BACKGROUND/OPTIONS

- 3.1. Cathedral View initially approached the Council for a grant in the sum of £20,000 to enable them to provide a forest school, which was approved. This was to be provided on another piece of land but it is understood that negotiations on various pieces of land fell through.
- 3.2. Cathedral View approached the Council in July 2022 with a request for a licence of land at Willow Walk, Ely as they had identified that the land would be suitable for a forest school and carried out investigations with the land registry to ascertain ownership. At the time, there was another interested party in the land and both parties were invited to provide documentation to support their requests.
- 3.3. Cathedral View provided all the relevant documentation but nothing further was heard from the other party. The legal department were then instructed to take the matter forward.
- 3.4. If the licence is granted, Cathedral View accept that this does not provide permission for the use of the land as a forest school and have confirmed that they will obtain any necessary planning permission. The proposals include no permanent structures on the land and they would be looking to have a firepit

shelter, chemical toilet and storage container, which would be designed to fit in with the environment with wooden exteriors. Cathedral View staff will be fully trained in forest school and outdoor first aid.

- 3.5. The proposed terms of the licence are that this will initially be for a term of 5 years, at a monthly rental of £500 (no VAT) per calendar month. Cathedral View will be responsible for maintenance of the land together with any fencing which is in situ and erected during the term. There will be a break clause after 2.5 years for both parties. In addition, the Council will be able to use the parking area within the land for up to 6 days a year with one month's prior notice.

4.0 ARGUMENTS/CONCLUSION(S)

- 4.1. The argument for granting the licence for the forest school is that it would allow a piece of disused land to be used for a forest school to teach children to respect and conserve our environment whilst learning in the outdoors. In addition, it would provide income to the Council through the licence fee.
- 4.2. The argument against granting the licence is the loss of immediate access to the land should the Council wish to develop or use this land in future.
- 4.3. Given that it would be proposed that a break clause be included in the licence and the Council would also have the option to use the grassed area at the front of the site for parking when needed, the benefit to Cathedral View Childcare from providing the forest school would outweigh the loss of immediate access to the land by the Council.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS / EQUALITY IMPACT STATEMENT / CARBON IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 5.1. There are no additional financial implications arising from this report.
- 5.2. Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required.
- 5.3. Carbon Impact Assessment (CIA) completed. In summary, the CIA concluded as follows: For ECDC, the overall impact is neutral, as ECDC's role is simply as freehold owner of the land to be licensed and that action in itself has no meaningful carbon impact arising. However, from a District wide perspective, ECDC's role is directly facilitating the activity to proceed (i.e. it won't proceed in this location if ECDC does not facilitate it). As a consequence, ECDC is indirectly facilitating the District wide impacts that may arise from the proposal. The overall District wide carbon impact is likely to be neutral as there will not be any construction of permanent buildings and the land will remain very much in its current state.

6.0 APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Map of the area

Appendix 2 - Copy Proposal

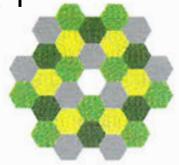
Appendix 3 - Letter from Cathedral View Childcare Ltd dated 13th July 2022.

Background Documents:

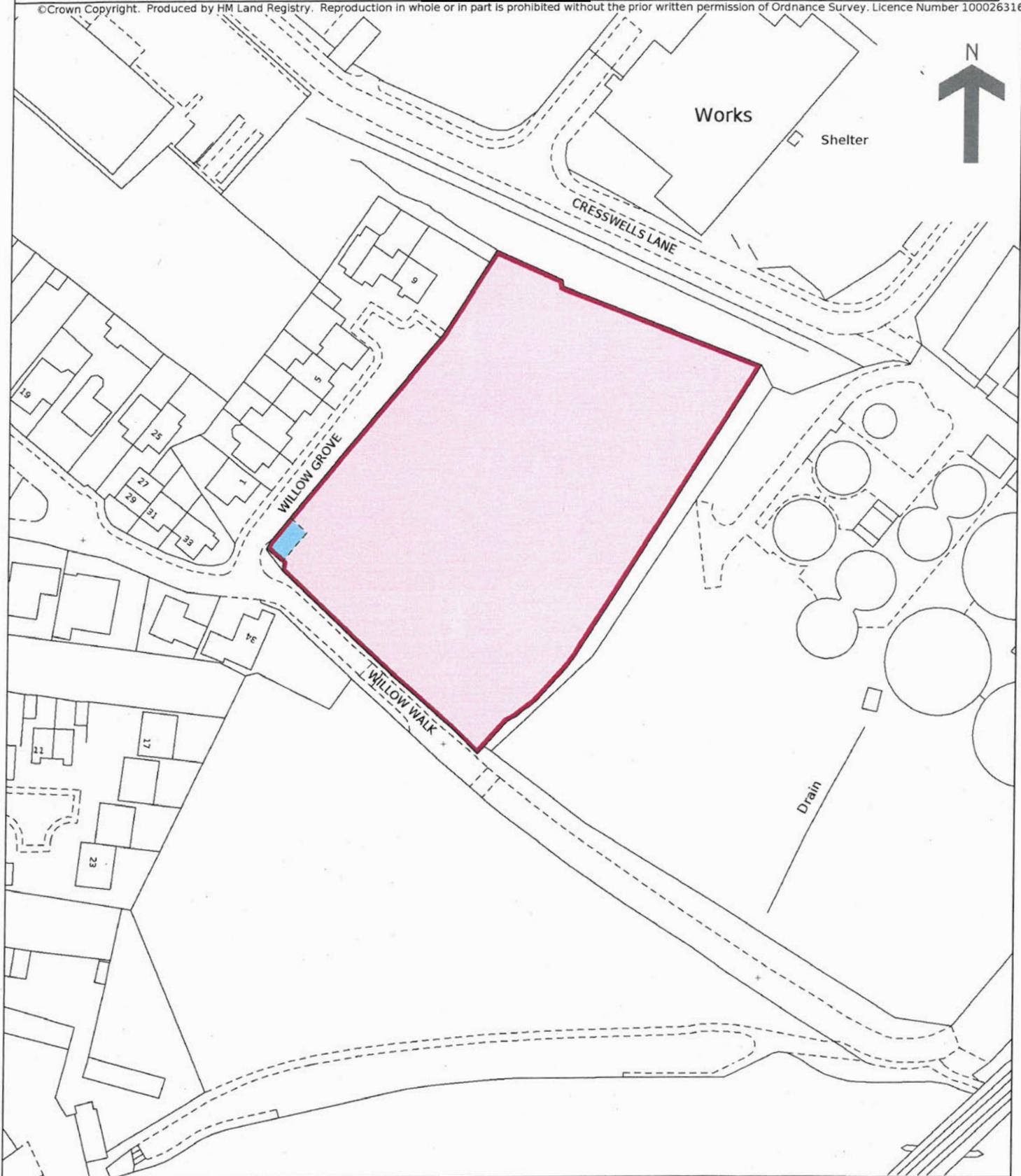
Legal File 6101 - some information contained within the file is Exempt.

HM Land Registry
Official copy of
title plan

Title number **CB287817**
Ordnance Survey map reference **TL5480SE**
Scale **1:1250 enlarged from 1:2500**
Administrative area **Cambridgeshire : East**
Cambridgeshire
Map of the Area



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Cambs

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ForestSchool@cathedralviewchildcare.co.uk

Welcome to Cathedral View Forest School

On the following pages you will find information about what a forest school is, the ethos, and our plans for opening one in the Ely area, that we hope you will find a useful tool during your discussion about our enquiry.

Section 1. Cathedral View Childcare

Cathedral View Childcare Ltd is a small scale, independent day nursery in the city of Ely. Providing care for children ages 0-5 years, the setting has ambitions to expand its facilities within the area and offer a more unique and comprehensive early years education to the children of East Cambridgeshire.

As explained in further depth throughout this document, we would like to set up a Forest School within Ely, available not only for use by our own setting, but for children who do not attend our childcare as well.

There are no Forest Schools within Ely, and this initiative is crucial in teaching the younger generation to respect, understand and care for our environment, subsequently teaching them of the importance of sustainable and eco-friendly approaches to life and their future.

As a setting we have always been committed to providing apprenticeships to local people and these initiatives would allow us, as a small business, to continue to give something back to the area with new job prospects, as well as providing a learning opportunity that the children of Ely would otherwise not have.

We already have had a number of enquiries as to whether this is something we could offer in the future, showing that the interest and need for such a facility locally is present.

Section 2. What is Forest School?

Forest School is a child-centred inspirational learning process, that offers opportunities for holistic growth through regular sessions. It is a long-term program that supports play, exploration and supported risk taking. It develops confidence and self-esteem through learner inspired, hands-on experiences in a natural woodland setting.

Forest School has a developmental ethos shared by thousands of trained practitioners around the world, who are constantly developing their learning styles and skills to support new and imaginative learners. Its roots reach back to the open-air culture, friluftsliv, or free air life, seen as a way of life in Scandinavia where Forest School began. It arrived in the UK in 1993 and has grown from strength to strength since then.

The process helps and facilitates more than knowledge-gathering, it helps learners develop socially, emotionally, spiritually, physically and intellectually. It creates a safe, non-judgemental nurturing environment for learners to try stuff out and take risks. Forest School inspires a deep and meaningful connection to the world and an understanding of how a learner fits within it. Their approach to risk means that learners constantly expand on their abilities by solving real-world issues, building self-belief and resilience. The belief that risk is more than just potential for physical harm, but a more holistic thing, there are risks in everything we do, and we grow by overcoming them. Forest School therefore, helps participants to become, healthy, resilient, creative and independent learners.

In addition to this, Forest School provides learners with the knowledge and understanding that is fundamental to conservation of our natural environments through teaching the children to respect, care for and understand nature is something that we feel is key to ensuring the next generation commit to greener, more eco-friendly choices. The programme is run by fully qualified staff members only, and also teaches children skills such as safe use of tools, knot-tying, shelter building and more, all whilst also following the government set curriculums such as the Early Years Foundation Stage.

We would like to set up our own Forest School group in central Ely, offering opportunities to learn, explore and grow. This is something that has been backed by East Cambs District Council who have provided us with a small grant to help us set up.

Locally, there is no forest school facility within Ely that offers year round access to the wider public. Whilst many schools have a weekly lesson for their pupils, this is not a facility that is accessible to children ages 0-5 within the city. In the wider area, the nearest designated forest school offering full childcare is in Chippenham, and smaller groups are available once or twice a week in Witchford, Histon, Huntingdon and Milton.

Once trained, our aim is to provide sessions as an extension to our current provision, for children who already attend Cathedral View Childcare, but also to offer additional sessions across the week to those who do not attend the setting.

Section 3. Setting up a Forest School.

In order for us to effectively set up and run a Forest School in Ely, we require access to an area of woodland, where we can create a safe and secure learning environment.

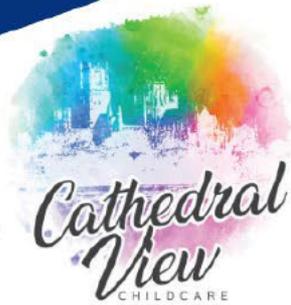
Unfortunately, the area of land we were in discussions about turns out not to be available to us. After a lot of searching for a suitable area, of which there are very few in Ely, it seems that the only suitable woodland is potentially owned by yourselves, and so we come to you for help in bringing our plans to life and helping us to provide this valuable learning opportunity to the local children.

We are hoping to secure an area of woodland that we can agree a long-term lease for. This area would be maintained and well looked after. We would need to install some fencing for safety of the children, and as Forest School takes place whatever the weather, set up a natural shelter area that ties into the surroundings. The trees would be cared for, as would all other natural vegetation and wildlife.

We sincerely hope that you may be able to help us with this, and look forward to hearing your thoughts.



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APPENDIX 3

90 Merivale Way,
Ely,

Wednesday 13th July 2022

To Whom it May Concern

Further to a telephone discussion earlier today, I am writing to express our interest in the area of land at the bottom of Willow Walk, Ely, that is owned by East Cambridgeshire District Council.

I own and manage a small children's nursery in Ely, and as part of our provision we are looking to open a forest school. In case you are unaware of what a forest school is, it is all about learning to respect and conserve our environment whilst learning in the great outdoors. Children learn about plants, animals and habitats, as well as how to care for them, be environmentally friendly and also enhancing their early years development through exploration and play in such an environment. This is something not available within Ely and is something we are keen to put in place not only for the children already attending our setting, but for the wider public too. Our idea has even been backed by yourselves already, and you have approved a grant to help us do this.

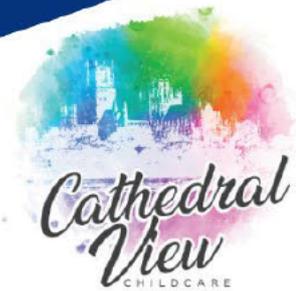
However there is very limited woodland spaces available within Ely, and so we have found it difficult to progress our idea further. Whilst we had previously been at the final stages of securing a site, this has fallen through and as such we have continued our search. We have become aware of the site at Willow Walk, with its lovely woodland space, and feel that it would be the perfect environment for our forest school. We understand that since it's purchase by yourselves in 2004 the land has only had sporadic use as an overflow car park for events, and there are no plans in place for development. Should our plans go ahead, we would of course continue to allow the use of this land on request for parking.

I was wondering if you would consider a longer term lease of this land for our project. This is a project that I feel would enhance the lives and learning of so many children within Ely and the surrounding areas, providing them with knowledge and experiences they wouldn't otherwise get and I would really like to find a solution to this.

To outline our plans further, we would be looking to run 2 hour long sessions 2 or 3 times per day (once established and dependent on demand). These would consist of 2 sessions for 0-4 year olds, followed by an after school session.

In line with the ethos of Forest School, all flora and fauna would be respected and the children taught about the importance of this. No permanent structures would be required, and we would be looking to have a firepit shelter, chemical toilet, and storage container, all of which would be designed to fit perfectly into the environment with wooden exteriors. As part of the experience, fully trained staff (all staff will be trained in Forest school, outdoor first aid, and early years) will at times offer experience using a fire pit. This will be in a contained space, well managed and not cause any damage.

In addition to this, the woodland would be well maintained by our team, with nettles and brambles cleared and replaced with appropriate woodland foliage such as ferns and meadow flowers. Some woodchip may be used for pathways, but again respecting any habitats in place. All other learning is conducted using the environment as it is.



APPENDIX 3

90 Merivale Way, Ely, Cambridgeshire



We are aware of planning permissions required, and will undertake the applications ourselves. We would have full insurance cover in place, for which we have already sought a high quality provider for and so there would be no liability falling to yourselves.

We would like to offer a rental fee of £500 per calendar month, and hope that you find our proposal of interest.

I have attached a document for you to look at that explains a Forest School, and our plans a little more. I hope that I have provided sufficient information to aid you in a decision, however if you require anything further please do let me know.

I look forward to your response.

Kind Regards
Hayley Pierson
Cathedral View Childcare

